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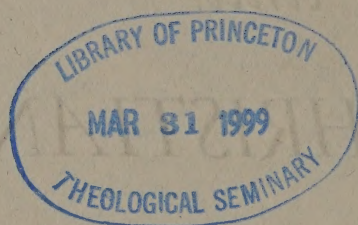
HINDUISM

and

CHRISTIANITY

by

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SAT-PRACHAR PRESS, INDORE.

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THEOLOGICAL SEM

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November, 1977

HINDUISM AND CHRISTIANITY

You have heard and read many attacks on the Christians and their missionaries. It is not possible in a few pages to clear up all misunderstandings or refute all errors. I am convinced that these attacks proceed mainly from ignorance about the true nature of the Christian religion and the real intentions of the missionaries. Fair-minded Hindus will be anxious, I am sure, to hear also what the Christians have to say for themselves. I shall, therefore, try in a few words to give you some idea of what the Christian religion is and teaches in distinction from Hinduism.

Many say that all religions are equal and that all teach the same.

It is true that there are many things taught by all great religions. All teach us, to some extent, to love God and our fellowmen, all forbid to murder, to steal and cheat, to slander, to tell lies, to dishonour father and mother, to commit adultery, to hate or wish harm to others, etc.

Still, look at some of the major differences between the two religions.

1. Hindus hold conflicting opinions about God. Many teach that God is one with the world (adwait), others that God is distinct from the world (dwait).

We Christians believe that there is one God, the almighty and perfect Creator and Lord of heaven and earth, who created us out of love, who is in us but distinct from us.

2. Orthodox Hindus still believe in many avatars (f. i. Matsya, Kachchhap, Varaha, Ram, Krishna, etc.)

and in numerous gods and goddesses. Many are the stories told about them. All old-time national religions, like those of the Greek, Romans, Egyptians, Germans, etc., had similar stories, but people long ago gave up believing in them.

We Christians do not believe in numbers of gods and goddesses who seem to have the same passions and failings as human beings. But we do believe that once in the history of the world, only 19 centuries ago, God did appear in human form. A real human being indeed, but far removed from the passions, vices and failings which afflict other men. The fact of his existence and his wonderful life have been subjected to the most minute historical scrutiny, especially during the last two centuries, with the result that they are more firmly established than ever.

3. Traditional Hinduism teaches that for the common people the road to salvation is a very long one. They have to pass through 84 lakhs of births, including births in animals, before reaching deliverance. Even then their salvation will not be permanent, but after a long time the cycle of births will begin anew.

Compared with this we Christians believe in a very short way to salvation. We are certain that we pass through only one life on earth and then shall be judged by God according to our works. The good will receive eternal salvation, the wicked eternal condemnation.

4. Hinduism teaches that man must get rid of sin and the effects of sin through his own efforts, by great acts of penance or through a very great number of births. It believes in the law of "karm", according to which our good and evil deeds produce of necessity their reward and punishment from which not even God can or does deliver

us.—On the other hand many Hindus believe that they can get rid of all their sins by taking a dip in the Ganges or dying on its banks or pronouncing the name of Ram or Shankar, without mentioning the need for true sorrow and a change of heart.

We Christians believe that Jesus Christ has died on the cross to give satisfaction for our sins and that because of it God as a merciful Father forgives them, provided that we are truly sorry for them and try to avoid them. We believe that men cannot rid themselves of their sins through their own efforts alone.

5. Hindus believe that the souls of animals are the same as those of men and that, therefore, the killing of animals is a sin. (This is contrary to the belief of the ancient Aryans, of the time of the Rigveda, who believed that the killing of animals, even of cows, was permitted.)

We Christians hold that men have spiritual and immortal souls, whilst animals have only material and mortal souls and are destined to our use and service.

6. Most Hindus still believe that there is a difference of men by birth, that there are low and high castes and untouchables, that it is a sin to marry outside one's caste or to accept food and water from all people indiscriminately.

We Christians hold that in the sight of God all men are born equal and that he is the highest who loves God and his fellowmen best. We believe that there is no sin in marrying outside one's caste or group or to accept food and water from all.

7. Orthodox Hindus do not believe in the equality of man and woman. To be born a woman is said to be a punishment for sins in a former life.

We Christians hold that before God man and woman are of equal spiritual worth, in spite of all differences in character and vocation.

8. Orthodox Hinduism teaches that for a widow to burn herself with her dead husband is a virtuous act; also that it is permitted for a man to have more than one wife.

We Christians hold that both are grave sins.

9. Hindus commonly believe in astrology and charms.

We Christians believe that our life and future depend only on God's providence and our own efforts, not on stars and charms.

N. B. In the above we have given what is, or was till recently, the common Hindu teaching. Not all Hindus believe the same. Educated Hindus often take pride in the fact that Hinduism leaves room for all different opinions. Any reasonable man will admit that conflicting opinions cannot all be true. Instead of enlightening the mind with the clear light of truth, which is one, will not a religion with many conflicting opinions rather confuse it with a mixture of truth and error?

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After giving a number of important distinctions I may be permitted to treat more widely of two more differences which bring out the special character of Christ and his religion and which help to explain the claims and intentions of the Christians and their missionaries.

1. Compared with Hinduism and other religions, Christianity lays much more stress on the central role of

love of God and of our fellowmen. Because the difference is important and because it explains the life of the missionaries, it will be good to quote a few of the utterances of Jesus and his Apostles.

When asked which commandment is the greatest, Jesus replied: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and thy whole soul and thy whole mind. This is the greatest of the commandments, and the first. And the second, its like, is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments, all the law and the prophets depend". "This is my commandment, he told his disciples, that you should love one another, as I have loved you". "The mark by which all men will know you for my disciples will be the love you bear one another".

This love is to embrace also one's enemies. In the sermon on the mount he said: "You have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour and hate thy enemy. But I tell you, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, pray for those who persecute and insult you, that so you may be true sons of your Father in heaven, who makes his sun rise on the evil and equally on the good, his rain fall on the just and equally on the unjust. If you love those who love you, what title have you to a reward? Will not the publicans do as much? If you greet none but your brethern, what are you doing more than others? Will not the very heathen do as much? But you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect". "When thou givest hospitality, invite poor men to come, the cripples, the lame, the blind: so thou shalt win a blessing, for these cannot make thee any return; thy reward will come when the just rise again".

According to Jesus, love demands service, and is the

measure of a man's greatness. "You know that, among the Gentiles, those who bear rule lord it over them, and great men vaunt their power over them; with you it must be otherwise; whoever would be a great man among you, must be your servant, and whoever has a mind to be first among you, must be your slave. So it is that the Son of Man (namely Jesus himself) did not come to have service done him; he came to serve others, and to give his life as a ransom for the lives of many".

When he depicts the final judgement, he makes it plain that he will reward or condemn us according to how we have dealt with our fellowmen, for as Judge he will say to us: "What you did to one of the least of my brethren here, you did it to me . . . What you refused to one of the least of my brethren here, you refused it to me."

His disciples repeat this important lesson after him. St. John f. i. wrote: "God is love; he who dwells in love dwells in God, and God in him". "He that loves not, abides in death". "God has proved his love to us by laying down his life for our sakes; we too must be ready to lay down our lives for the sake of our brethren".

And St. Paul: "Each of you must study the welfare of others, not his own". "The man that loves his neighbour has done all the law demands". "Bestow a blessing on those who persecute you; a blessing, not a curse . . . Do not repay injury with injury . . . Do not avenge yourself, beloved . . . Rather, feed thy enemy if he is hungry, give drink if he is thirsty . . . Do not be disarmed by malice; disarm malice with kindness".

2. Like the ancient religions of Greece, Rome, Egypt, Mesopotamia, etc., Hinduism is the religion of one

people, which has its origins in prehistoric times and is handed on from father to son and increases with the increase of the people that hold it. It is the only major religion of that kind left in the world to-day.

Christianity on the other hand is the religion founded by one man, Jesus Christ.

In the old books of the Jews it was foretold by several prophets, and therefore the Jews believed, that one man would rise up among them who would spread their religion throughout the world. They called that man the Messiah—the Anointed or Christ. He would be “a light for all the nations, and in him God would send salvation to the furthest corners of the earth”. “All nations would flock to the holy mountain, to the house of Jacob, where the God of Israel dwells”. According to the prophets the Messiah or Christ would be born of the tribe of Juda, from the family of David, in the town of Bethlehem. He would be “the great Counsellor, the mighty God, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of peace”. Even his sufferings and death were foretold.

About the time of Christ the Jews were expecting the Messiah to come—because the time had been foretold by the prophet Daniel—, but they thought of him as a great king, who would lead them into a great earthly kingdom and defeat the enemies of their nation. Therefore most of them did not recognize him in Jesus, the religious preacher, in spite of the great miracles he worked to prove that he was the expected Messiah in whom the prophecies were being fulfilled.

Jesus prophesied that his religion would be preached to all nations, that the Jews as a nation would be rejected, but that the other nations would come from the east and

the west to enter into the kingdom of God which he came to establish. He mentions, as quite a natural thing, that the good deed of a woman, who anointed his feet, would be mentioned in the whole world wherever his gospel would be preached. He said of himself: "I am the light of the world", "I am the way, the truth, and the life", "though heaven and earth pass away, my words will not pass away". Moreover he prophesied that after having been lifted up from the earth (on the cross), he would draw all men to himself. At the end he said to his disciples: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me; you, therefore, must go out, making disciples of all nations, and baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all the commandments which I have given you. And behold I am with you all through the days that are coming, until the consummation of the world". (Even the enemies of Christianity admit that Christ is a great Saint. Yet the claims he made for himself, if they are not true, would rather prove that he was an impostor and full of blasphemous pride.)

Look at some of the obstacles that stood in the way of the fulfilment of these prophesies. Jesus was a member of a small nation that was despised by all the great nations surrounding it. He chose a few simple, unlearned disciples and gave them a training for about two or three years. He died before their training was complete, overcome, it seemed, by his enemies. He sent these Jewish disciples to preach his gospel to the highly civilized peoples of the great Roman empire and to all the nations of the earth. As part of his religion they had to teach a number of deep mysteries, which seemed to defy belief, and that he, who died on the cross, was the Son of God, equal to God the Father. He gave his disciples the command only to preach; they were not to make use of the sword. He

foretold them that they would be hated and persecuted and that people would tell falsely all kind of evil things against them. For the first 300 years the might of the Roman empire was often pitched against his Church to crush it.

In spite of all these handicaps his words and those of the old Jewish prophets have come more and more true. Already 45 crores of people in all parts of the world are members of his Church, whilst another 30-35 crores are Christians who are more or less close to the Church he founded. There have been times when the Church seemed dormant and weakening, as with a man who is falling asleep, but only to wake up with more vigour and strength. To-day her moral influence is enormously greater than 50 years ago and she is increasingly gaining the respect and sympathy of many whose forefathers had been taught to view her with a strong hatred or dislike.

The fact that in Jesus Christ and his Church the many prophecies have been fulfilled, is one of the proofs which make Christians believe that his religion is meant by God for all mankind.

Christ told his disciples to go and preach the gospel to every man. Even to-day thousands upon thousands of his disciples, men and women, leave their country and family and all they hold dear, to follow his command. They go to Japan and China and Hindustan and Africa and to the farthest islands of the South Seas or the remotest regions of the ice-bound north, they go into the universities or into the deepest jungles, wherever they find men willing to listen to them. And when some people close their frontiers or their minds against them, they will go to others and meanwhile bide their time till those who now refuse to listen, or their children's children, have become



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willing to listen to their message. The work will never finish until all have found their way into the kingdom of Christ.

And what is the main message they preach?—It is that “God so loved the world that he sent his only-begotten Son, and the Son, Jesus Christ, so loved us that he gave his life on the cross for our salvation”. Jesus was not satisfied with loving us with an infinite love. He wished to prove it by voluntarily undergoing death for us on the cross and by making the fruits of his death available to us through his Church. Through her he wishes to do for men all the things he did when visibly walking on earth: to teach us divine truth, to forgive our sins, to endow us with divine life, to guide and protect us, and to prepare us for the glorious day when we shall enter into the bliss of his heavenly Father.

This explains why we Christians believe that in the face of this gift of God’s love and mercy, man has the duty to accept. Therefore Jesus said: “He that believes and is baptized, shall be saved; he that believes not, shall be condemned”. Jesus will condemn those who through their own fault, through wilful shutting of their eyes or sinful neglect, do not believe. He will not condemn where there is no fault.

Many of you do not wish that the Christians try to spread their religion, but what would you think of a man who is convinced he possesses such treasures, yet is too selfish and lazy to take the trouble to share them with his fellowmen? Could not love of their fellowmen be the real reason why so many Christians feel obliged to spread their religion?

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